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Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "West German students at UM tell of life in the U.S." (1982). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 7382.
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MEDIA RELEASE

braun/rv
3/12/82
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WEST GERMAN STUDENTS AT UM TELL OF LIFE IN THE U.S.

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MISSOULA--

The best way to get to know another country, most people would agree, is to live there. But one of the most interesting and cheapest ways to learn about your own country is to listen to someone just getting to know it.

Two students from West Germany recently offered some interesting insights into American life. Martin Detmer, 23, of Mannheim, and Martina Lanfermann, 22, of Cloppenburg, received full-year scholarships to the University of Montana through the German Academic Exchange Service, a program similar to the Fulbright Scholarship program in the United States. The program was initiated at UM by Albert H. Yee, professor of education, and is in its second year.

According to Detmer, the most important attribute foreign students need to have is an open and curious mind. "Getting another perspective is what the whole program is about," he said.

He said there are three ways West Germans learn about America: through reading about it, meeting Americans traveling abroad, and from hearing news on radio and TV. "Meeting people brings you closest to reality but it still leaves you with a lot of stereotypes," he said.

Detmer, whose English is excellent, said that it was impossible to make any valid generalizations about America but that the country does share certain common features. The size and vastness of the country allow for more diversity

(over)

German Students--add one

than smaller countries and, he said, there exists an "interesting tension between diversity and uniformity."

Lanfermann, who previously spent a year in England, thinks that Americans are not so friendly as the English. She said she was shocked at first by all the swearing Americans tend to do. She was also amazed to find that many people live in basements.

Detmer said that the American influence is strongly felt in West Germany. Even the German language, he said, reflects this influence. Words like "jeans" and "hamburgers" have become part of the German vocabulary.

While many Germans admire much that is American, at the same time they don't want to be "swept over culturally or politically dominated," Detmer said. He said Americans don't really understand the political situation in West Germany. Being so close to the Iron Curtain makes a big political difference. "Americans have an ocean between them and Russia," he said.

Both Detmer and Lanfermann have completed their second year at universities in West Germany. But they are actually more advanced than their American counterparts because in Germany students attend high school for five years instead of four. Also students are required to take two foreign languages. Lanfermann had nine years of English and seven years of French before graduating from high school.

In contrast to the U.S. system, German students declare a major as soon as they enter a university. After their second year, they declare a specialty within their majors.

Lanfermann, who is studying English and religion and hopes eventually to teach, said courses at the University of Montana are easier than those she takes at the University of Osnaburck but that she has to study more at UM. At her university, she said, they don't have any exams until their final year.

(more)

German Students--add two

When she returns to Germany, Lanfermann said she will spend six months writing a thesis and will start preparing for finals. She must take comprehensive oral and written exams in English and theology, and additional oral exams in psychology, education and in another elective subject.

Detmer, a student at Frankfurt University, is studying English with an emphasis on linguistics. Both he and Lanfermann were attracted to UM because of their interest in Native American studies and a desire to attend a small university. Detmer is also interested in studying in international law and said that while he hasn't decided on a career, he would perhaps like to teach English at a university, become a journalist or go into foreign service.

As a result of her stay in Montana, Lanfermann said she plans to "do more sports" when she gets back home. Montanans are more conscious of staying physically fit, she said. Since she's been here she's become interested in body building.

Detmer said he has become more open and independent during his stay in the United States. And, he noted, "The way you relate to people depends not so much on the people you meet but on yourself."

He and Lanfermann will return to Germany after the end of spring quarter. While neither live with local families, both have local hosts that help them learn more about the non-academic side of American life. Detmer's hosts are Mr. and Mrs. John Peterson Jr. of Missoula and Lanfermann's hosts are Mr. and Mrs. Phil Bain.

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